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AUTHOR Franson, Joseph Paul
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ABSTRACT

The author describes an approach to mainstreaming handicapped middle school students in which students were placed in a regular remedial class with a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and an aide. The model evolved originally because of staffing problems, but achievement in both self confidence and academics resulted in its continuation. It is explained that an earlier decision to have special education courses parallel regular education whenever possible helped to ease the student's transition. The range of special-regular education options and their interrelatonships is depicted in a chart. (CL)

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MAINSTREAMING

THE GLENBROOK MODEL

by

Joseph Paul Franson*, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Mainstreaming learning disabled students into regular education classes is one of the goals of special education programs throughout school systems in the country. Student success in regular classes is often used as a yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of special education programs. Strategies vary between school districts and within school districts as to the most effective way to mainstream students. Some of the more conventional methods include removing the student from regular classes and providing individual, small or large group remedial instruction until the student can return to and function in regular classes. These techniques have met with varying degrees of success.

It has often been the case that students who have responded well to remedial instruction have returned to regular classes and suffered relapses or failed. Special education teachers are not surprised by this reaction because they realize that success for their students does not rely solely on intellectual competence. Emotional factors and other personality traits often mitigate against student success. Students in these circumstances often lack confidence in themselves or are still in

*Assistant Principal, Glenbrook Middle School, Longmeadow, Mass., 01106.

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need of some individual support once they are mainstreamed. A factor which provided complexity to this problem is that the support is needed immediately while the student is IN the regular class. When support is provided between regular classes, too much time has elapsed. The seed for self-doubt has already taken effect and shaken the student's confidence. The student then begins to look toward the special education classes as the way to success. This reaction is predictable because it was in this environment that success was last experienced. While this may seem best to the student, it is this phenomenon which contributes to the cycle of retaining capable students in special education programs when they have the capability of succeeding in regular classes.

Need Determines New Direction

At the Glenbrook Middle School in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, we have evolved a model of special education which attends to this problem. The word evolved is used here because it most accurately describes how our program came into existance. In the spring of 1978, twelve fifth grade students were diagnosed as being in need of special education in mathematics and reading the following year, their first year in middle school. A group this size would command the complete attention of our entire special education group so an alternate plan had to be devised. Our response to the problem was to target one teacher and an aide (part-time) to be responsible for all the grade six students' special education needs. It would mean that one person would provide all small and large group instruction, and individual tutoring. This in itself was not a large departure from what was already our practice. What diverted us from this course, however, was the large group of students in need of

help in mathematics and reading. Since we could not send them all to one teacher for special instruction, we reversed the process by having the students assigned to regular remedial mathematics and reading classes and sending the special education teacher and the aide to support the regular teachers. The results of this decision far exceeded our most optimistic expectations.

Student Profiles: Regular vs. Special Education

Many students targeted for regular program remedial classes in many cases do not differ significantly from any of the students in special education classes. Indeed, it is not unusual that students in regular classes are sometimes less capable than some of their classmates in special education classes. The reasons for this condition are varied. Sometimes students with good intellectual capability are emotionally disabled and are provided with special services aimed at helping them overcome this handicap. Other times students are placed in special classes by parents who are overly zealous in obtaining all of the services available for their children in the school district. There are many other plausible reasons for students to be placed in either remedial or special education programs, however, it is sufficient to note that while the condition exists it is one in which the two groups are different often in degree rather than in kind.

Curriculum and Program Mechanics

Several years ago it was decided that the work done in special education courses would, where possible, parallel regular education courses. This was designed to ease a student's transition into and out of regular education and special education classes. In this way a student

would be doing grade level work and would avoid the necessity of having to make up the many lessons missed during the absence. This decision would also come to serve us well under the Glenbrook model of mainstreaming.

At this point if may be helpful to summarize the conditions under which the model was made to begin operation. First, an overload of students demanded special education services from a department that was too far understaffed to provide for them on an individual or small group basis. We responded by placing these students in a regular remedial class with a regular education teacher, a special education teacher and an aide. Secondly, our decision was supported by two factors, (1) the educational profiles of the students in the regular and special education classes were in most cases similar and (2) the programs of study in most cases would be similar in both regular and special education classes excepting only those students who are severely disabled. Our intention was to provide for both groups within the framework of the regular education classroom.

We targeted this model for grade six remedial reading and mathematics. The prime responsibility for the combination special-regular class was given to the regular classroom teacher. This responsibility included final authority in all matters of teaching and learning. The special education teacher with the exception of having final authority would be a full partner and would provide valuable insights into the teaching of learning disabled students in general and their mutual students in particular. In addition, assistance would be provided in teaching classes and correcting papers, classroom management in general

and in student and program evaluation. It was our aim that students would come to think of themselves as having two teachers.

The results after one year were both encouraging and gratifying. Of the twelve special education students mentioned earlier, nine of them had progressed so dramatically that in grade seven it was necessary to create a middle ability, transition class in English. This class consisted of ten regular, middle ability students and those nine who in grade six were previously identified as learning disabled. In all other classes the special education students were assigned to remedial or middle ability classes.

The lesson learned from combining special and regular education teachers in a single teaching and learning situation in grade six was not lost once the students reached grade seven. In every class where a special education student was assigned, a team of special and regular education teacher was also assigned. Currently, special education teachers accompany their students to classes in English, social studies, science, mathematics and reading. Next year a transitional English class will be created in grade 8 accommodate those students who are currently in the grade 7 English transitional group and will not have obtained enough skill to be released to regular middle ability English classes.

The Glenbrook Model

Figure 1 illustrates the current mainstreaming model of special-regular education options and their inter-relationships. It can be seen that there are four major options at each grade level. They are (1) totally self-contained special education program, (2) individual or small group, special education program, (3) combined special education program,

and (4) regular education program. The single and double arrows are indicative of the many transfer options that are available to a student. It is possible, with the exception of some of extraordinary cases in the self-contained program, for a student to be in classes which are incorporated many of the programs simultaneously. For example, in grade 6 students may be assigned to a heterogeneously group homeroom in which they would receive that mode of instruction. Later, they might go to a combined special-regular education class in mathematics or reading where they would receive mathematics instruction from special and regular education teachers. If it is deemed necessary that further instruction is necessary, students may be assigned to small group or individual instruction from the special education or aide.

For example the current year began with four students assigned to the self-contained special education program. By the third quarter all four students were participating to some degree in regular education classes. Each, however, was accompanied by special education teachers (Trackers) who learned the regular education programs themselves and assist the regular education teachers not only with special education students but with regular education students as well.

Result

The growth in academic achievement in the participating students has in itself been remarkable. There has, however, been two other significant results which are important to relate. In the first instance there has been the growth in the self-confidence of the special education students. All students in a school know the academic pecking order of students. For years, special education students had been apart from

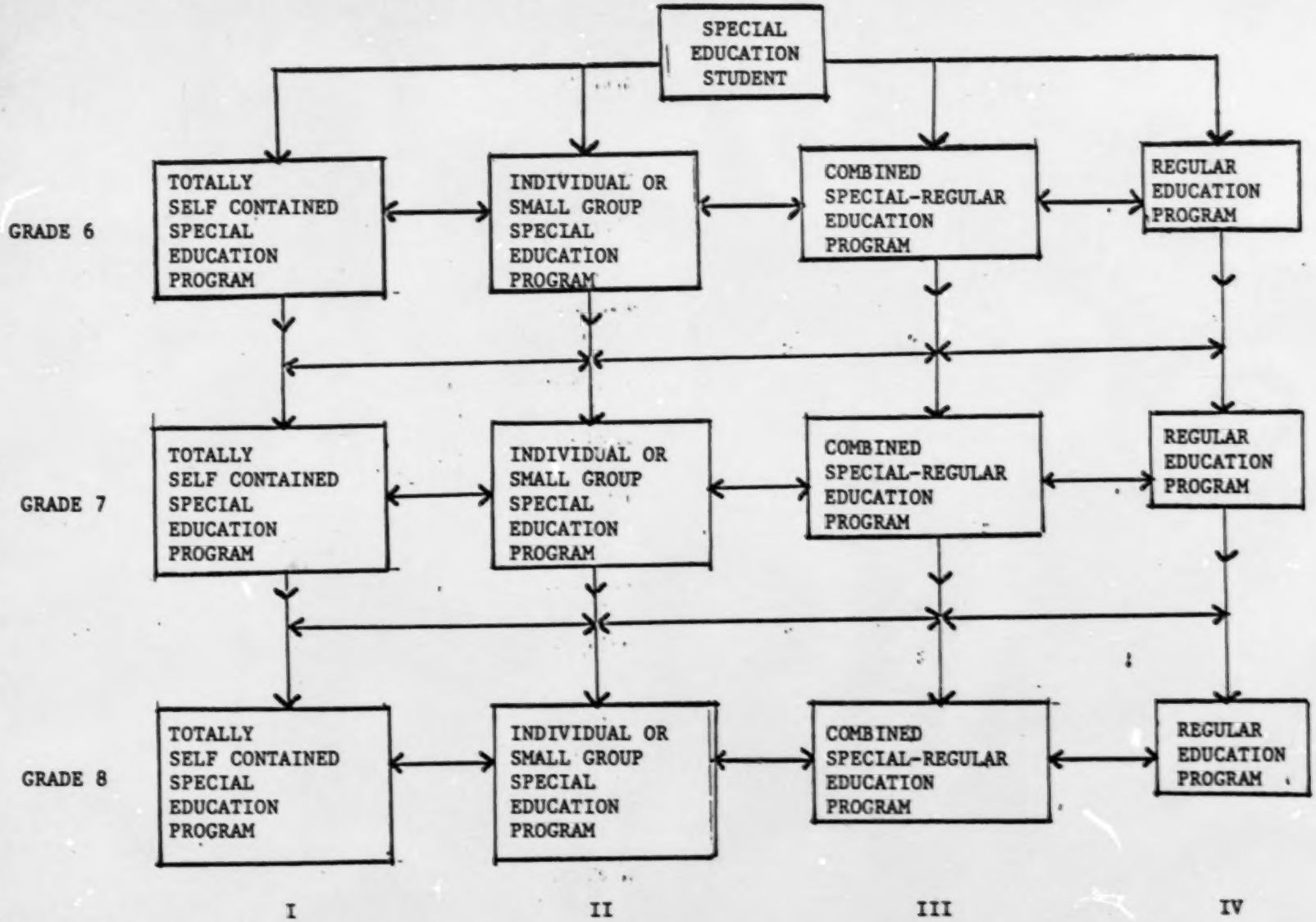

FIGURE 1 - MAINSTREAMING - THE GLENBROOK MODEL

the "smart kids". They came to feel they were different if not less capable. We feel that their interaction with regular education students and their successful competition with them academically may have special education students thinking that they are not so different after all. This is manifested in much more sunny dispositions, their positive interactions with adults and their ability to rebound when they have met with setbacks. All special education teachers know that this is a telling feature in student growth and emotional maturity.

The second significant result is that for the first time in twelve years we have a situation where students are LEAVING the programs where special education instruction is needed. By way of example, of the twelve students needing special education instructions in grade 6, only nine needed to be assigned to the transitional program in grade 7 and only five will need a transitional course in grade 8. We feel special education program dependency that students often have throughout their entire school career can now be broken. Further, it can be done in a manner in which our students experience academic and emotional growth, and they can participate in the larger school community with a newfound sense of self-worth and dignity.

Conclusion

There may be a tendency on the part of some readers to think that this is possible only in a Longmeadow type of community (affluent). This is clearly not the case. All communities expend a considerable amount of resources to special education programs. It is therefore, a matter of commitment and mind set to declare this issue tc be in the best interest of your students and begin the process. The technology and skills

are available. We at Glenbrook have made use of them. And like the road least traveled, we feel it has made all the difference.